

About LifeRing

LifeRing is a network of people who support one another in living free of alcohol and other non-medically indicated addictive drugs.

LifeRing meetings, in person and online, are friendly, confidential, non-judgmental gatherings of peers. The atmosphere is relaxed, practical, and positive.

LifeRing members believe that complete abstinence from alcohol and other non-medically indicated drugs is the necessary foundation for us to lead a better life. The desire to stop drinking/using is the only requirement for membership in LifeRing.

In LifeRing meetings, your religious and spiritual beliefs, or lack of them, remain a private matter. There is no religious or anti-religious content in the meeting process.

LifeRing does not require participants to follow any particular steps or guidelines, other than staying clean and sober. Each participant builds a personal recovery program tailored to their individual needs. Our meeting format and literature provide a structure for this project.

This brochure reviews a recent court decision that requires government employees to offer clients a choice of both religious and secular support groups. Courts have consistently held that 12-step groups are religious. LifeRing is a secular group. Both have their place. Read more about the ruling inside.



To find out more about LifeRing:

Browse to www.unhooked.com, the Internet voice of LifeRing Secular Recovery. Join LifeRing **email lists** and **chats**.

Read *Recovery By Choice: Living and Enjoying Life Free of Alcohol and Drugs, A Workbook*. A 300-p. self-help workbook that helps you build your personal recovery plan.

Read *How Was Your Week? Bringing People Together in Recovery the LifeRing Way*. A LifeRing convenor's handbook.

Read *Presenting LifeRing Secular Recovery: A Selection of Readings (3rd Edition, magazine format)*. Why LifeRing works and why more counselors are referring patients to LifeRing meetings.

Read *Keepers: Voices of Secular Recovery*, a paperback with motivational anecdotes, stories and poems.

Read *The LifeRing Bylaws*. How LifeRing is organized and self-governed.

Buy these books at LifeRing meetings or online from www.lifering.com. LifeRing will be happy to send a speaker or speakers to address your audience.

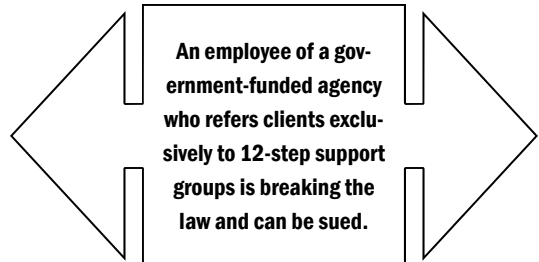
Contact LifeRing:

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You can find a LifeRing meeting at:



Choice of Support Groups: It's the Law



An employee of a government-funded agency who refers clients exclusively to 12-step support groups is breaking the law and can be sued.

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Choice of Support Groups: It's the Law

If you work for a government-funded agency handling substance-abusing clients, you need to know about the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeal's ruling in the case of *Inouye v. Kemna* (Sept. 2007). If you refer your clients exclusively to 12-step groups, you could be sued.

If you're a prisoner or other client of the government and your judge, parole officer, or counselor refers you exclusively to 12-step groups, and this violates your beliefs, you have a right to sue. Read on.

Ricky Inouye was imprisoned in Hawaii after conviction on drug charges, and served his time. As a Buddhist, he objected to participating in 12-step treatment programs because of their religious nature. He sued his parole officer for giving him the "choice" of AA/NA meetings or prison. The federal Court of Appeals in San Francisco ruled in his favor. It held that 12-step programs are "religious" under the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution. Compelling someone to attend 12-step programs violates the ban on establishment of a religion.

This court ruling is not the first of its kind. It merely follows virtually identical cases decided earlier by the federal Courts of Appeal for the Seventh Circuit (Illinois, Indiana, Wisconsin) and the Second Circuit (New York, Connecticut, Vermont), in addition to a string of similar cases in lower federal courts and in state courts. The "unanimous conclusion" of these courts was that coercing a person into AA/NA or into treatment programs based

on the 12 steps was unconstitutional because these programs are religious in nature.

The court's ruling means that a criminal justice officer -- or, by extension, any agent of the state, local, or federal government or employee of a government-funded agency within the bounds of the Ninth Circuit -- can be sued for damages if they ignore a client's religious or anti-religious objections and coerce the person to attend 12-step meetings or 12-step based treatment programs. The ruling is the law in California, Oregon, Washington, Arizona, Montana, Idaho, Nevada, Alaska, Hawaii, Guam, and the Northern Mariana Islands.

What should prisoners, parolees, other clients, and government employees do in response to this ruling?

(1) Prisoners, parolees and other government clients who have problems with the religious content of 12-step programs should stand up for their beliefs and make their objections heard, loud, clear, early, and on paper. In this case, Ricky Inouye won in part because he wrote letters and filed suit promptly after he was coerced into 12-step programs. He held to his position consistently, and enlisted legal help as soon as possible.

Prisoners and parolees need to make it clear both in words and deeds that they earnestly want to remain clean and sober, that they are willing to participate in alcohol and other drug treatment programs and to attend support groups, but that the religious content in the 12-step programs violates their constitutionally protected beliefs and interferes with their recovery.

Prisoners and parolees can match these words with actions by demanding referral to non-religious (secular) treatment options, if they exist, and by taking the initiative to organize secular support groups, such as LifeRing, on their own.

(2) Government employees, such as officials in the criminal justice system (and others with coercive powers over substance offenders) need to offer their clients a choice between religious and secular treatment programs and support groups. The "choice" between AA/NA or prison offends the Constitution, and officers who insist on it need to check their professional liability insurance.

Government officials can help themselves as well as their clients by sending the message to treatment programs that the programs must embody a secular track along with the 12-step track, or risk losing referrals. Officials need to inform themselves and their clients about the availability of secular support group alternatives, such as LifeRing.

Where clients take the initiative to organize such support groups, officials need to be cooperative and provide a level playing field when it comes to rooms, publicity, literature, referrals, and other resources. In an appropriate case, officials may take the lead in initiating the groups.

The basic thrust of this line of cases is that the constitutional guarantee of freedom of and from religion extends over the whole of the United States, including the ever-expanding areas enclosed by prison walls. Since so many prisoners are there because of substance use, this recent ruling serves as an important refresher. Jails and prisons, notoriously in California, are overcrowded and in deplorable condition. The decision says that the freedom of religious belief or disbelief must not go down the drain along with so many other elements of civilized penal treatment.

The full text of the decision is available at http://unhooked.com/trxpro/Inouye_v_Kemna.pdf